

The Moral Libertarian Case Against Promoting Myths

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Moral libertarianism calls for a vision of a genuinely free market of ideas, where individuals with Equal Moral Agency (EMA) can participate in the debate, criticism and improvement of every idea. Of course, such a system would only be functional if there is no deceit. That is, everyone is required to participate in the free market of ideas in good faith, with every individual aiming to contribute to their best ability towards moving things closer and closer to the truth. To achieve this, we need to promote the importance of being sincerely truthful at all times when it comes to discussing big ideas with moral implications.

The Promotion of Myths is Dangerous

People don't always act in good faith, unfortunately. It is not uncommon for people to put ideas forward, not because they believe it will get us closer to the truth, but because they want to provoke certain reactions, to get certain results. The most common form of this would be the person who would say anything to gain attention or to further their career. Even more dangerous would be to promote myths to inspire political action. The first person who explicitly argued for the promotion of myths to generate political action was probably 19th century French thinker Georges Sorel, who believed in using the myth of the General Strike to further class struggle. Mussolini, the father of fascism, was strongly inspired by Sorel. In fascism, it was instead myths of nationalism and race that were used to generate political action, action that would lead to previously unimaginable horrors. The experience of 20th century fascism stands as the strongest reminder of how dangerous it is to promote myths in order to advance political ideology.

However, the promotion of myths do not have to be deliberate. While most people are not as immoral as to promote political myths deliberately, the unconscious promotion of political myths can be just as dangerous. For example, promoting the idea that immigrants are destroying the traditional culture of the country can easily fan racist and ultra-nationalist sentiment, that will be translated into illiberal political action. Another example is the promotion of the false idea that the political centre is continually moving to the right, which is quite common in leftist circles. This idea leads people to falsely believe that they should embrace far-left politics to counter a trend that does not really exist. (I mean, how is our current political centre to the right of the 1950s centre? How is this belief even logical?) The unconscious promotion and propagation of myths most commonly occur in echo chambers, something which we must avoid at all costs.

Nobody is Entitled to Their Own Truth

Another way the promotion of myths can be justified, either consciously or subconsciously, would be through moral relativism. Moral relativism is the belief that each cultural group can have their own version of the truth, and the differing versions of 'truth' are not objectively better or worse than each other. It would follow that whatever a group believed sincerely could be counted as truth by definition, at least for that group. It would then follow that, for example, if a group believes that it is oppressed, it is their truth, and they should have the right to promote and propagate this view with impunity. This actually leads directly to the justification of promoting political myths! After all, many Germans in the 1930s did feel that their race was being oppressed, especially after being fed Nazi propaganda. Failing to critically examine this belief led to the biggest horror of all time. While moral relativism actually arose later, its attitude of allowing subjective feelings to be equated to truths would be in line with what happened in 1930s Germany.

Of course, there is an objective truth, and there is an objective morality, that is not the result of cultural or social construction, and that cannot be altered by social engineering. The fact that people may differ in their interpretation of truth is a function of the limitations of human ability and the flawedness of human existence. Thus, while moral libertarians should uphold the right of individuals to speak out about their sincerely held beliefs without penalty from others, this should stem from recognising that no human being is always right, and that no human being has the adequate moral standing to prevent another from speaking, rather than any kind of moral relativism. Moral libertarianism insists that individuals are entitled to speak up about their most sincerely held beliefs about what the objective truth is. This is, however, very different from the idea that individuals should be entitled to their own truths, regardless of the objective truth.